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PSYCHOSOCIAL INTERVENTION PROJECT BASED ON STRENGTHS IN JARDINES EL CERCADO

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Abstract

The general objective of this research was to design a psychosocial intervention project aimed at strengthening personal strengths in vulnerable adolescents from the Jardines El Cercado community, in Guarenas, Miranda State, during the 2025 period. Methodologically, the study was developed under a qualitative approach with an exploratory phenomenological-hermeneutical design, framed within the feasible project modality. The population and non-probability purposive sample consisted of six key informants: two school directors, a young volunteer, and three school-dropout adolescents. For data collection, field notes from passive direct qualitative observation, semi-structured interview guides, and the standardized VIA-Youth character strengths questionnaire were used. The results of the qualitative analysis and triangulation evidenced a dynamics of socioeconomic vulnerability and family detachment as main risks, counteracted by protective school environments and the presence of innate strengths in the youth. The VIA profile highlighted tenacity, gratitude, hope, citizenship, and honesty as main strengths. It is concluded that the proposal, titled Semillas de Proposito and focused on perseverance and teamwork, offers a viable and remedial community solution to enhance the well-being and integral resilience of the participants against environmental adversities.

Keywords: Character strengths, psychosocial program, positive youth development, non-formal education, community, resilience.

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1. Introduction

Venezuela's socioeconomic environment has created conditions of systematic vulnerability that affect the holistic development of adolescents, limiting their opportunities for continued education and exposing them to ongoing psychosocial risks. Faced with this reality, traditional community interventions tend to focus exclusively on deficiencies and deficits, overlooking the intrinsic capabilities of the individuals involved. The purpose of this Special Graduation Project was to design a psychosocial intervention project based on the Positive Psychology approach, specifically aimed at enhancing character strengths and offering strategies that promote resilience and well-being in critical contexts.

This research aligned directly with the global guidelines for sustainable development, specifically addressing three of the fundamental goals of the international agenda (United Nations, UN, 2015). First, it was linked to SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being, by directing actions toward the promotion of mental health and the development of positive psychological resources in young people exposed to environments of exclusion (United Nations, UN, 2015). Second, it connected with SDG 4: Quality Education, as the project directly addressed the issue of school dropout at the community level by proposing non-formal education strategies that complement formal academic education and strengthen young people's retention in the education system (United Nations, UN, 2015). Finally, the study aligned with SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities, by proposing a remedial intervention design in a historically disadvantaged community, seeking to empower a vulnerable population through equitable access to human development programs (United Nations, UN, 2015).

The phenomenon under study was defined as the lived experience of adolescents in situations of psychosocial vulnerability, with the aim of understanding how they perceive and relate to their character strengths and psychological well-being in a context of widespread socioeconomic crisis and school dropout. The central problem was identified in the Jardines El Cercado community, a peri-urban settlement in Guarenas, Miranda State, Venezuela, characterized by limited public services, dynamics of family disintegration, and a rising rate of withdrawal from the formal school system among young people. This was broadly conceptualized as a situation of adolescent psychosocial vulnerability. During the author's diagnostic phase and preliminary investigations, it was found that the lack of spaces for guidance and community support exacerbated institutional disengagement and the absence of structured life plans. The

researcher faced the challenge of engaging with a fragmented social fabric, where immediate economic pressures often overshadow interest in personal development programs. However, the key finding was that, despite severe material deprivation and disengagement from school, the young people demonstrated a latent willingness toward group collaboration and mutual recognition of abilities.

Given this scenario, the following research question was formulated: What aspects should be considered in a psychosocial intervention project to promote well-being—based on character strengths—for a group of vulnerable adolescents in the Jardines El Cercado community in Guarenas, Miranda State, Venezuela, in the year 2025?

To answer this question, the following General Objective was established: To design a psychosocial intervention project based on character strengths aimed at adolescents in the Jardines El Cercado community, located in Guarenas, Miranda State, during the year 2025.

To guide the research process, the following Specific Objectives were established:

1. To assess the psychosocial risk factors and character strengths present among adolescents in the Jardines El Cercado community through the perspective of key informants.
2. To identify the character strengths profile of the participating adolescents by administering the standardized VIA-Youth questionnaire.
3. Establish the theoretical and methodological foundations of positive psychology and community intervention as they apply to the design of the proposal.
4. Structure the operational components, action plan, and evaluation mechanisms for the “Semillas de Propósito” psychosocial intervention project.

2. Theoretical framework

To construct the theoretical framework that served as the basis for the design of the Strengths-Based Psychosocial Intervention Project aimed at adolescents in the Jardines El Cercado community, a progressive approach was structured, beginning with the general conceptualization of psychosocial programs and moving toward the specific principles of positive psychology. Initially, it was established that these programs are coordinated efforts to mitigate poverty and inequality, seeking to improve the quality of community life (Badajoz & Pérez, 2022). This perspective was grounded in Erik Erikson’s Theory of Psychosocial Development for resolving developmental crises (Caicedo & Perozo, 2025; Mario, 2018; Regader, 2025), complemented by the Latin American perspective of Maritza Montero (Velásquez, 2017), who emphasized that

social intervention must transform living conditions through the active participation and self-management of the communities themselves.

Once the scope of the community intervention was defined, the theoretical framework moved toward understanding the specific dynamics of the target population: adolescents. It was posited that during this life stage, human beings undergo profound cognitive, emotional, and social transformations (Montagud, 2021). To understand how the environment influences these changes, the theoretical framework incorporated Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective (1976, as cited in Caicedo & Perozo, 2025), which allowed for the analysis of adolescents through various interactive systems: the ontosystem, the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the chronosystem, and the globosystem. This comprehensive approach facilitated the transposition of the ILO/WHO Joint Committee's definition of psychosocial factors (1984, as cited in Anaya-Velasco et al., 2021) from the workplace to the community setting, enabling an examination of the environmental influences affecting young people in Jardines El Cercado.

Based on this ecological framework, the theory categorized environmental influences into risk and protective factors. Risks were conceived as elements causally linked to health problems and dangerous behaviors in contexts of vulnerability, poverty, and family dysfunction (Marín et al., 2019, citing Tifani et al., 2013; Gómez, 2008). In contrast, protective factors were defined as variables that reduce the impact of these risks, promoting holistic well-being, positive development (García & Soler, 2020), and psychological well-being (Mendez et al., 2021). Under this approach, elements such as family support, communication, and self-compassion were identified as key buffers and promoters of resilience in marginalized communities.

The innovative core of the project was consolidated by integrating character strengths as the cross-cutting theme of the proposal, grounded in the Well-Being Theory of Positive Psychology. These strengths were defined as moral traits that lead to virtues (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, as cited in Garassini, 2024) and that, in adolescents, function as powerful protective factors and sources of resilience (Garassini, 2022). To operationalize this idea, the theoretical framework adopted Peterson and Seligman's VIA classification, which organizes 24 strengths into six broad virtues: Wisdom and Knowledge, Courage, Humanity and Love, Justice, Temperance, and Transcendence (Seligman, 2003). Thus, fostering these virtues was established as the fundamental strategy for mitigating threats from the vulnerable environment.

Finally, the feasibility of the study was supported by a review of existing research and programs demonstrating the effectiveness of this approach among adolescents. Notable international and local initiatives included the program "Adolescents, Group Identity, and Rural Environments" (Paricio et al., 2016), which demonstrated how healthy environments strengthen self-esteem and integration, thereby reducing exclusion. Likewise, the study incorporated the experience of "Growing Strong" (García & Soler, 2020), which demonstrated that fostering positive assets reduces risky behaviors, and the "Psychological Well-Being" study (Méndez et

al., 2021), focused on self-compassion and empathy as relational resources. The rationale also included the "Positive Promotion" program (Garassini, 2022), which is valuable for mobilizing strengths to foster inclusion in marginalized contexts, and the proposal by Avalos (2022), which emphasized the development of hope and optimism to improve future expectations and motivation among young people with low prospects. All of these references confirmed that character building is an ideal path for the positive development of youth in vulnerable contexts.

3. Method

Regarding the methodological framework, the research was guided by a qualitative, phenomenological, and hermeneutic approach, with an exploratory scope and a "Feasible Project" design (Hernández-Sampieri & Mendoza, 2018; UPEL, 2016). The method was characterized by its remarkable flexibility and adaptability, which proved indispensable due to the scarcity of prior data in the area and the need to tailor the process to the realities and unforeseen circumstances encountered in the field. This flexibility justified the use of the VIA Character Strengths Questionnaire in a purely complementary and interpretive manner, fully adapting to the researcher's limitations in the field, rather than seeking statistical generalizations. The study's structure included significant milestones such as the gradual immersion in the field—which began at the Jardines El Cercado Cemetery and extended to the Tito Cardozo State Educational Unit—and the use of a Digital Field Journal alongside semi-structured interview guides (M. L. Gemini, 2025a; M. L. Gemini, 2025b), ensuring rigor through expert judgment (Navarro Caro, 2009) and criteria of triangulation and credibility. Finally, participants were selected through intentional non-probabilistic sampling. Among the selected sampling units, the participation of two key groups stood out, acting as key informants within the context of the research:

- High school staff (administrators): This group consisted of two administrators from the Tito Cardozo State Educational Unit, an institution with approximately 400 students. These staff members provided a fundamental institutional and pedagogical perspective on the reality of the area, and explicitly warned of the increase in school dropout rates because young people were forced to prioritize earning a living over their education.

- The adolescents: These were three young people living in the community who had dropped out of school. Their daily lives took place at the Jardines El Cercado Cemetery, where they worked as gardeners and plot attendants. The research delved into their life stories, resilience, and daily struggles, and additionally assessed their personal strengths using the VIA questionnaire.

In addition, the study was supported by a young adult volunteer from the area, who played a key role as a facilitator, helping to build rapport, organize meetings, and establish trust with the adolescents when administering the research instruments.

4. Results

With regard to the objective of characterizing the adolescents and their strengths, the analysis of the adolescents' reality in the Jardines El Cercado community revealed a complex dynamic between environmental risk factors and individual psychological capacities. The profile of the three key participants revealed a population that, despite being immersed in a socioeconomic crisis that threatened their educational continuity, possessed well-defined internal structures of resilience.

Through the administration of the VIA-Youth inventory (Park & Peterson, 2006, VIA Institute on Character), it was determined that perseverance (diligence), gratitude, hope (optimism), citizenship-teamwork, and honesty are the predominant strengths. These five strengths do not operate in isolation but act as a direct counterbalance to the risks identified in the following relationship matrix.

Table 1

Main Character Strengths in Adolescents						
	Tenacity and perseverance	Gratitude	Hope and optimism	Citizenship and teamwork	Honesty	
Psychosocial Risk Factors / Character Strengths (+)						Psychosocial Protective Factors / Character Strengths (++)
1. Critical Psycho-Emotional Vulnerability. Demotivation, discouragement, inability to provide for basic needs.	+ (promotes growth) ++	++	+ (triggers motivation) ++	++	++	1. Innate Individual Strengths: Resilience, autonomy, willingness to speak up, creativity, empathy, teamwork, willingness to listen to teachers, and goal achievement.
2. Family Dysfunction and Emotional Detachment. Lack of parental figures, neglect of children, and a lack of supervision and emotional support at home.	+ (help in the face of adversity) ++	++	+ (inspires a better future) ++	+ (enjoys peer support) ++	++	2. School as a Companion (in its role as a source of protection and affection). Despite its challenges, school continues to be recognized as a vital space.
3. Negative Social Pressures from Friends. Friends' influence toward unproductive or risky activities, inappropriate leisure, dropping out of school, and exclusion.	+ (resistance to negative influences) ++	+ (values support) ++	+ (inspires a better future) ++	+ (values positive support networks) ++	+ ++	3. Institutional Support (Tito Cardozo School). The administration's willingness to collaborate and its vision for a project focused on strengths.

Main Character Strengths in Adolescents						
	Tenacity and perseverance	Gratitude	Hope and optimism	Citizenship and teamwork	Honesty	
Psychosocial Risk Factors / Character Strengths (+)						Psychosocial Protective Factors / Character Strengths (++)
4. Disillusionment and School Dropout. Lack of motivation in school activities and accelerated academic dropout driven by socioeconomic factors and the perception of a lack of support when needed.	+ (academic effort) ++	+ (values education) ++	+ (pursuing education to advance) ++	+ (tendency toward collaboration and cooperation) ++	++	4. Favorable Perceptions Regarding the Development of Social Skills and Participation in Sports and Cultural Activities. The young volunteer commented on this aspect on behalf of the adolescents he knows and based on his own experience during that stage of life; therefore, this perceptual factor could serve as a valuable protective factor.
5. Socioeconomic Crisis. Inability to meet basic needs, leading to a sense of helplessness and prioritizing "material survival" over education.	+ (overcoming obstacles)	+ (appreciation for opportunities)	+ (better quality of life)	+ (community actions)		
6. Digital Environment. Young people facing a wide digital divide and lacking adult guidance, exposed to dangerous content such as cyberbullying and online harassment.	+ (critical thinking)		+ (pressure for a safe environment)	+ (mutual online support in the face of risks)	+ (reporting abusive content)	

Main Character Strengths in Adolescents						
	Tenacity and perseverance	Gratitude	Hope and optimism	Citizenship and teamwork	Honesty	
Psychosocial Risk Factors / Character Strengths (+)						Psychosocial Protective Factors / Character Strengths (++)
7. Lack of Safe Spaces for Sports, Cultural, Recreational, and Community Activities. There are no places where teenagers can unwind in a healthy and safe way outside of school or home.	+ (proposing alternatives)	+ (appreciation for the support provided by organizations or community leaders)	+ (hope for new opportunities)	+ (organization of projects)		

Note: Adapted from Table 13.13, "Sample Matrix for Establishing Links Between Categories" by Hernández-Sampieri, R., and Mendoza Torres, C. P., 2018, *Research Methodology: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methods*, p. 495.

+, Link between psychosocial risk factors and the five main character strengths of adolescents.

++, Link between psychosocial protective factors and the five main character strengths of adolescents.

According to this matrix, in the face of the risk of dropping out of school stemming from the need to generate immediate income, the strengths of tenacity/perseverance and citizenship/teamwork—supported by gratitude, hope/optimism, and honesty—enable adolescents to maintain a long-term vision of achievement, viewing education not only as an obligation but as a tool for social mobility.

The relationship between risks and strengths shows that tenacity/perseverance—supported by gratitude, hope, and optimism; citizenship and teamwork; and honesty—mitigates social vulnerability. In a context where institutional support is scarce, adolescents rely on their peer networks to sustain their life plans. The participants' profiles demonstrate that self-awareness of these virtues facilitates a transition from apathy toward personal agency. The findings suggest that risk does not disappear, but young people's perception of their own ability to influence their environment changes significantly as they recognize their character strengths.

This analytical narrative confirms that psychosocial interventions should focus on strengthening the resourcefulness already present in the group. Adolescents in Guarenas do not merely survive the crisis; they use their capacity for work and their sense of belonging to create spaces of well-being amid precarious conditions. Therefore, the results validated the need for a program that formalizes these natural tools, transforming everyday resilience into a structured and sustainable life plan.

The characterization of the adolescents and the review of interventions carried out to develop strengths in this population led to the psychosocial intervention for adolescents described below.

4.1 "Seeds of Purpose" Intervention Proposal

Following the research, the "Seeds of Purpose" psychosocial intervention project was designed for implementation in the Jardines El Cercado community with both remedial and preventive objectives. The proposal served as an extension, in non-formal educational contexts, of the "Seeds of Resilience" initiative from the Tito Cardozo Educational Unit (U.E.E.). The core objective was formulated to strengthen two (2) of the five (5) predominant character strengths: Industry (perseverance, diligence, and a sense of accomplishment) and Teamwork. The target population consists of adolescents between the ages of 12 and 18 who are not enrolled in the formal education system, with a special emphasis on those in vulnerable situations within the informal labor market. The theoretical framework is based on Seligman and Peterson's Positive Psychology and Well-Being.

4.1.1. Rationale and Context of the Intervention

It was demonstrated that the youth of Jardines El Cercado face a challenging and multifaceted reality and are exposed to multidimensional risk factors that threaten their holistic development:

- Family and Emotional: Dysfunctionality, emotional detachment, absence of father figures or responsible caregivers, and a lack of emotional supervision at home.
- Social and Community: Negative peer pressure, a lack of safe public spaces, and an unregulated digital environment.
- Economic and Educational: Disillusionment and school dropout, socioeconomic crisis, demotivation due to the lack of formal employment, and an inability to meet basic needs.

Despite this landscape, it was found that young people possess innate strengths (such as gratitude, honesty, hope, and optimism) that are at risk of fading if they are not valued or reinforced. A lack of intervention in perseverance and teamwork could lead to self-centered behavior, low tolerance for frustration, dishonesty, and a passive or pessimistic role with r the community. It was estimated that intervening based on strengths would allow for a shift from a deficit-based approach to one focused on potential, promoting success, social engagement, a reduced risk of depression, and care for the environment.

4.1.2. Project Objectives

General Objective: To strengthen the "Industry" virtue (perseverance, diligence, sense of accomplishment) through teamwork among adolescents who have dropped out of or been excluded from the educational system in Jardines El Cercado, thereby fostering their resilience, psychosocial well-being, and productive integration into the community.

Specific Objectives:

1. To foster self-awareness and the conscious identification of the strengths of Industry and Teamwork, supported across the board by gratitude, hope/optimism, and honesty.
2. To equip participants with life skills and socio-emotional tools linked to diligence and cooperation.
3. To channel youth participation into meaningful projects (community, entrepreneurial, cultural, or sports-related) with tangible results stemming from their efforts.

4.1.3. Methodological Structure and Phases of Action

The project is structured progressively into three operational phases:

Phase I: Uncovering Strengths (Duration: 2 to 8 weeks).

Focused on building rapport, establishing trust, and conducting individual and group assessments.

Cultural and Recreational Activities: Outdoor recreational activities to attract young people.

Peer Relationships: Safe spaces for emotional release to process anxiety and daily challenges.

Strengths Assessment: Administration of the VIA instrument and community surveys through the training of significant adults ("Strengths Room").

Strengths Classroom: An 8-week extracurricular project for the theoretical and practical teaching of perseverance and cooperation.

Phase II: Mobilizing the Strengths of Industry and Teamwork (Duration: 2 to 12 weeks).

Action-oriented practical phase focused on technical training and social-emotional development.

Art, Crafts, and Entrepreneurship Workshops: Design of simple products (baked goods, handicrafts) for local sale and integration with INCE's formal technical training.

Community Gardening: Restoration of green spaces through urban agriculture and landscaping.

Social-Emotional and Resilience Modules: Specific workshops on self-awareness, stress self-regulation, social awareness (conflict resolution), and collaboration.

Phase III: Progress in Strengths (Duration: 1 to 4 weeks / Annual evaluation).

Phase focused on consolidating the project and building connections with the community ecosystem.

Project Celebrations and Career Fairs: Semiannual events to showcase achievements and connect young people with educational and employment opportunities.

One Community: Coordination of permanent institutional networks (schools, churches, foundations, and businesses).

Innovation Workshops: Review, update, and design of new intervention proposals.

4.1.4. Logistical Feasibility and Resources

To implement the program, a map of interdependent needs was developed:

- Human Resources: Led by 1 Project Coordinator (part-time) and 2 workshop facilitators. Supported by a network of psychologists, social workers, educators, students performing community service, and neighborhood leaders.
- Infrastructure and Materials: Use of classrooms at the Tito Cardozo U.E.E. and community spaces. Requires agricultural tools, educational supplies, and materials for hands-on workshops.

- Institutional Partnerships: Active collaboration with the Tito Cardozo U.E.E., INCE, cultural centers, foundations, and local businesses.
- Financial Support: Funds allocated for logistics, food, transportation, materials, and seed capital for small businesses.

4.1.5. Program Evaluation Model

The goal was for the project to clearly measure and demonstrate its results from start to finish:

1. Initial Evaluation: Assessment of pre-existing strengths, perceived needs, and design adjustments at the start of the program.
2. Ongoing Evaluation: Direct monitoring of participation levels, attendance records, qualitative feedback on workshop dynamics, and tracking of achievements in the workshops.
3. Final Evaluation: Measurement of impact through quantitative questionnaires on satisfaction and perception of change (focused on self-esteem, motivation, and sense of purpose). This is complemented by a qualitative evaluation through focus groups with participants and key community stakeholders.

In essence, this system provided a structured approach to monitor the project at all times and verify through evidence that it is helping young people

5. Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

The completion of the research revealed a profound disconnect between the psychological potential of out-of-school adolescents and the formal support structures in the Jardines El Cercado community. The phenomenological-hermeneutic analysis showed that, despite adverse socioeconomic conditions and latent psychosocial risks, these young people are not a group devoid of resources. Methodological surprises that emerged during fieldwork demonstrated that vulnerability and resilience coexist dynamically, manifesting themselves through adaptive skills that typically go unnoticed by traditional educational assessment systems.

It was concluded that dropping out of school creates a structural void that adolescents attempt to fill by engaging in informal subsistence activities and spontaneous social networks. In these everyday interactions, significant clusters of teamwork strength were identified, which acts as a natural protective mechanism against exclusion. However, the strength of perseverance or diligence was found to be significantly fragmented due to the lack of structured medium- and long-term goals, which hinders the development of sustainable life plans. The novelty of this finding lay in the fact that the lack of perseverance does not stem from an intrinsic deficiency in the young person, but rather from the absence of environments that validate and channel such effort toward constructive purposes.

The participatory assessment also yielded critical conclusions regarding the perceptions of significant adults. A gap in interpretation was evident between school staff and the reality experienced by adolescents. While the school system tends to frame school dropout in terms of strictly behavioral and academic performance indicators, the young people's accounts revealed complex emotional, family, and economic dimensions. The "Seeds of Purpose" initiative demonstrated its remedial relevance by articulating these conflicting perspectives within a psychosocial intervention design that did not impose external criteria but rather harnessed the identified strengths of citizenship and collaboration to build the participants' individual perseverance.

Recommendations

Based on the findings described, the research recommendations were structured into two broad operational categories:

The first category promotes the expansion and methodological inclusion of the key stakeholders considered in the design of the psychosocial intervention. The strategic need was identified to incorporate as many adolescents from the community as possible into

subsequent diagnostic phases, thereby ensuring that in-depth individual interviews and focus groups would continue to gather firsthand information on their specific needs and potential. This measure would offer the advantage of strengthening the qualitative representativeness of the phenomenon and refining the modules of the proposal. Likewise, with regard to significant adults, it was recommended to actively include the entire teaching staff of the partner school and to systematically incorporate structured interviews with parents and guardians. This approach would expand and complement the institutional perspective, allowing for a comparison of classroom demands with the realities of the family and community, which would enrich the program's framework.

The second category included suggestions related to actions derived directly from the comprehensive community assessment. The recommendations were aimed at promoting continuity, sustainability, and the strengthening of the social fabric in Jardines El Cercado, as outlined below:

- Formalize strategic inter-institutional partnerships with schools in the Guarenas area, facilitating the integration of the "Semillas de Propósito" program's activities into the regular school calendar. This collaboration would allow for the early identification of character strengths to serve as a preventive and predictive tool against school dropout. Additionally, it would be essential to establish a system for periodic follow-up and monitoring after program implementation, which would qualitatively assess not only the adolescents' continued attendance but also stable changes in their perception of subjective well-being, self-efficacy, and sense of purpose.

- For the community and local leaders: Create and strengthen community support networks that actively involve neighborhood and family representatives. The goal would be for the strengths identified and fostered in young people—such as civic engagement and cooperative work—to find a space for reinforcement and validation in their everyday home environment. At the same time, it would be useful to comprehensively document the participants' experiences, journals, and firsthand accounts in order to create a repository of local best practices. This record would serve as a model for methodological transfer that could be replicated in other communities in the state of Miranda, Venezuela, that face similar conditions of vulnerability.

- For the academic sphere: To delve deeper into research that links the principles of positive psychology with phenomenological approaches in other critical contexts and vulnerable sectors of Venezuela. It was suggested that the results of this study be leveraged as empirical basis for opening new lines of inquiry into community resilience and positive human development in adverse environments. Finally, the importance of maintaining methodological flexibility in subsequent intervention designs was emphasized, which would ensure that the activities and instruments designed retain

a constant capacity to adapt to the changing realities of the current socioeconomic crisis.

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